

2/17/2022

Raised Bill No. 5033, AN ACT ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF FOOD-INSECURE STUDENTS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

To Senator Slap, Representative Elliot and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Luke Villani, I am a student at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, from West Hartford, Connecticut. I stand in support of **Raised Bill No. 5033, AN ACT ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF FOOD-INSECURE STUDENTS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION.**

As it currently stands, my University is suffering a crisis of major proportions when it comes to the accessibility of food for students across the various campuses under the guise of UConn. For those who live on campus, meal plans are extremely expensive reaching a cost equal to dorming at UConn's cheapest housing option. The quality of food since I first began attending UConn has declined significantly, with less variation, portion control, stricter rules about when students can utilize dining services, the closing of cafes and restaurants which operated outside the hours of dining services that accepted meal plan points, and understaffing.

For myself, personally I have had many struggles with accessing food both while dorming at Storrs and my time as a commuter student in Hartford. Hartford students have nearly no form of accessibility to an affordable food supply, with UConn providing no formal institutions such as cafes or restaurants to students who have a hard time affording meals. The only food options for students are privately owned restaurants surrounding the Hartford campus which cater to employees of insurance companies and state institutions that can afford premium meals. Being a resident at Storrs, food insecurity has only increased in recent years with the closing of dining service operated establishments such as the Bistro, Dairy Bar Two, and various cafes that provided affordable and meal plan accessible food for those who commuted or missed a scheduled dining hall meal. Dining halls themselves have also declined during the pandemic, with the quality of food slipping due to budget cuts and low staff. My dorm's dining hall has only one chef who works part time and is at many times unavailable for service. Instead, poorly trained low-paid student workers create trays of food with sometimes spoiled ingredients and unsanitary conditions. In some cases maggots have been found in salad bars, and certain food items have run out within a single meal service, further limiting options at a rate which sinks our student body into debt.

This proposed bill will provide funds necessary for my University to improve conditions hopefully to pre-pandemic standards. My desire is that our University will reopen many of the on-campus establishments which brought proper food security to my peers, and give the University more accessibility to purchase fresh ingredients for our meals. This bill will also help combat the food insecurity at our lesser thought of regional campuses that desperately need some form of assistance so the future generation of Connecticut can focus on getting an education instead of worrying about their next lunch.

For those struggling to make it by at a time of global crisis within our own state, I ask you to approve this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Luke Villani

Undergraduate Student Government Senator of East and President of East Hall Council

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